The Lord Biſhop of BRISTOL's

SERMON

Preach'd before the RIGHT HONOURABLE

The LORD MAYOR,

THE

ALDERMEN, and GOVERNORS
of the ſeveral Hoſpitals of the City
of *London*,

On *Eaſter Monday*, 1751.

RB23 a 6640

COKAYNE, Mayor.

Tueſday *the* 16*th Day of* April, 1751. *in the* 24*th Year of the Reign of King* George *the Second, of* Great Britain, &c.

IT is *Ordered*, That the Thanks of this Court be given to the Right Reverend Father in God the Lord Biſhop of *Briſtol*, for his Sermon preach'd before this Court, and the Governors of the ſeveral Hoſpitals of this City, at the Pariſh-Church of *St. Bridget*, on *Monday* in *Eaſter* Week laſt; and that he be deſired to print the ſame.

MAN.

The VIRTUE *of being Merciful Stated and Enforc'd.*

A

SERMON

Preach'd before the RIGHT HONOURABLE

The LORD MAYOR,

THE

ALDERMEN, and GOVERNORS of the ſeveral Hoſpitals of the City of *London*,

IN THE

Pariſh-Church of ST. BRIDGET,

On *Eaſter Monday*, 1751.

By JOHN Lord Biſhop of BRISTOL.

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PROVERBS xi. 17.

The merciful Man doeth Good to his own Soul.

ONE of the moſt intereſting Subjects, on which we can employ our Minds, relates to the Good and Evil of Life; and the Ways whereby the one may be procured and increaſed, and the other prevented or abated. The greateſt indeed relates to the other World, in which our ſupreme Intereſts lie: But a proper Regard to the former muſt conduce likewiſe to theſe, as it implies Virtue or Duty on our Part, and ſo becomes a ſuitable Preparation for the Happineſs which ſhall never end.

Indeed, when one conſiders the abſolute Goodneſs of the Supreme Being, and finds that Attribute illuſtrated to us by the Proviſion made for the Happineſs of his Creatures, one might be tempted to think every thing would ſucceed well; that we had nothing to do but to lay hold of the Good before us; and that Miſery could no more ſubſiſt in Fact, than it could in the original Intention of our Creator.

Such

Such may be the Reflections of the merely ſpeculative Man, unacquainted with the real Conſtitution of Things: But, in fact, the Happineſs, which might be expected, is not attain'd; and the Miſery, which might not be apprehended, prevails: Whence therefore theſe untoward Appearances?

The true Anſwer muſt be drawn from the Nature of Man, and the Conſtitution of the World; tho' both of them, on God's Part, moſt wiſely fram'd, and pointed to the nobleſt Ends.

In reference to Man, if we conſider him as an *intelligent* and *free* Creature, in the one reſpect he muſt be *fallible*, and in the other *peccable*: Whilſt *fallible*, he may miſtake his own Happineſs; and as *peccable*, he may break in upon that of others: And thus may we account for Miſery in ſome Sort, either as fooliſhly ſelf-created, or maliciouſly produced in others.

To this may be added, That the Syſtem of Things about us, being govern'd by general Laws, can be ſubſervient only to a general End; I mean, the common Good; or, if you pleaſe, the greateſt Quantity of Good, upon the Whole, which can be produced under a wiſe Conſtitution. But in this caſe, it is plain, what the general Good requires may prove unfriendly

unfriendly to particular Intereſts; and ſo relative Evil may reſult from a greater and more general Good.

However, we may receive Comfort from reflecting, that, if under ſuch a Conſtitution as this, Evil doth in ſome Degree prevail, yet this is ſtill qualified by a proper Proportion of Good: That in caſe ſome are much leſs happy than others, yet, if they behave rightly under their preſent Circumſtances, amends ſhall be made hereafter: That this Stage is but a ſhort one, and only a Paſſage to another more enduring State: And that, whilſt we are travelling thro' this ſhort Paſſage, much may be done both by ourſelves and others, not only to improve the Goods of Life, but to abate the Evils of it.

To this Purpoſe it is remarkable (and which argues the infinite Goodneſs of our Creator) that God hath implanted in us certain natural Inclinations, whereby we are led to advantage others, at the ſame time that we ſerve ourſelves. Such particularly are *Goodneſs* and *Compaſſion*. By the one we are prompted to advance the Happineſs of our Fellow-creatures; by the other, to relieve their Diſtreſſes: And whilſt we act in Conſequence of theſe Principles, we promote our own particular Happineſs, and do ourſelves enjoy the very Good which we do to others.

It

It is not my preſent Deſign to treat of both theſe Principles (for they are in ſome Sort diſtinct from each other), but of the latter only: And even here the Text leads me rather to inſiſt on the Habit, than the natural Principle or Inclination itſelf: From whence I may be led farther to ſpeak ſomewhat of the ſeveral Acts or Inſtances, in which this virtuous Habit may ſhew itſelf.

What I ſhall offer on the preſent Subject, ſhall be reduc'd under the following Heads;

I. The Nature of the Virtue itſelf.

II. The Ground and Foundation on which it is built: And,

III. The ſtrong Motives which may engage us to cultivate and diſplay it.

As to the firſt, I muſt obſerve, That the natural Principle or Inclination, on which the Virtue now before us is built, is *Compaſſion*; or that State of Mind, in which every Man, not entirely degenerated, feels himſelf, upon the Preſence of any miſerable Object. By this Sort of inward Senſe, the Diſtreſſes of others are made his own; and he is impell'd to attempt their Relief, with as real a Concern, as he is to defend or relieve himſelf.

We

We perceive ſomewhat of this, even in the Brute Creation: Many of them run to the Relief of their own Species at leaſt; and almoſt all of them expreſs a Tenderneſs towards their Young. Such wiſe Proviſion hath God made for the Support of the animal Creation! And thus *his tender Mercies are over all his Works.*

The Principle before us, we may obſerve, being in ſome Degree common to the greateſt Part of the Animal Creation, muſt in that View be a blind and undiſtinguiſhing Principle. The Brutes having no Reaſon to direct it, muſt follow only as this Inſtinct itſelf calls them: And in Man the bare Inclination itſelf moves even before Reaſon can act: And tho' capable of being directed or reſtrained afterward, yet is of itſelf as undiſtinguiſhing in Man as other Creatures. It hath Reſpect only to Miſery, as its Object; and operates where-ever that Miſery appears.

Yet, tho' this Principle, conſider'd in itſelf, and its firſt Motions, be ſomewhat the ſame both in the rational and irrational Part of the Creation, there is, however, a Difference in the Progreſs it makes, either in the one or the other. In Brutes it always operates to the juſt Extent of its Power, incapable of leſſening or increaſing. In Man it may admit of either, as his reaſoning Power ſhall either check its Growth, or elſe forward it.

This carries me on farther: The Controul and Direction which Reaſon affords on this Occaſion, whilſt it contributes not to extirpate, but rather to favour and exalt this Principle, produces at length the virtuous Habit I am now treating of: For, *Compaſſion*, under the Command of *Reaſon*, and form'd by Practice into a ſteady and uniform Bent of Mind, makes the Character which the wiſe Man here ſets forth, when he tells us, *The merciful Man doeth Good to his own Soul.*

The Inclination unmanag'd may carry us on to improper Objects, and urge us to very unwarrantable Meaſures: For Miſery may be in ſome Caſes deſerved; or it may be neceſſary to produce a right Conduct in the ſuffering Perſon himſelf, as well as others. On ſuch Occaſions, the Compaſſion ſhewn will be Weakneſs. It may likewiſe lead us on, by indiſcreet Indulgence, to increaſe the very Miſery it would remove; and ſo, in the Reſult, produce as real Miſchief, as even Cruelty itſelf could do.

But the Caſe is otherwiſe, when Compaſſion is put under the Direction of Prudence. It then prompts us, either to remove, or to abate, as much as we can, the general Unhappineſs: And ſo, whilſt it endeavours to leſſen the Sufferings of ſome, will forbear to increaſe thoſe of others.

In

In ſhort, it moves to the Relief of thoſe only who ought to be relieved: It proceeds juſt ſo far in purſuing Meaſures for this Purpoſe, as Wiſdom allows it ſhould do; and when check'd in its Progreſs, leaves the Mind under a certain Degree of Regret, that Wiſdom, balancing on the real State of the Caſe, will not permit it to advance farther.

The Virtue of being *merciful*, as well as the *Compaſſion* on which it is built, hath Miſery for its Object: And in this it differs in ſome Sort from *Goodneſs*, whoſe proper Object is Good: And the Exerciſe of theſe Virtues, thus diſtinguiſhed, is in like manner different; for the one carries with it an Averſion to its Object, which it endeavours to remove; as the other implies a Love and Deſire, which urges to obtain it: Tho' it may indeed be obſerved, that as the removing Evil is the firſt Step to Good, ſo the very Acts of Mercy itſelf may ſo far be aſcribed to Goodneſs.

That Miſery, about which the Virtue under preſent Conſideration is converſant, may be diſtributed into two Claſſes: The one relates to our ſpiritual State, the other to our temporal.

As to that which relates to Man's ſpiritual State, it muſt be obſerved, That after this

Scene is clos'd, and *the Wicked are gone to their own Place*, as the Good ſhall have no Intercourſe with them, ſo they ſhall have no Concern about them: Beſides, their Miſery being ſo highly deſerv'd, and ſo ſtrictly neceſſary, they muſt ceaſe to be the proper Objects of Mercy.

What therefore belongs to the preſent Subject is, The preventing, whilſt we can, and as far as we are able, this dreadful Conſequence; whether, by ſupplying Men with the Principles of doing well, or by reclaiming them after having acted ill: For the State of Men under ſpiritual Darkneſs, let it be either of Ignorance, or of Error, or of Vice, may be conſider'd as Miſery of the worſt Sort, tho' perhaps unfelt by thoſe who labour under it; and which needing, doth on that account call for the tendereſt Concern of good Men.

Miſery, as it relates to our temporal Condition, is that which is commonly term'd Natural Evil; what is felt either in the Body or the Mind; and carries with it either ſome painful Senſations of the one, or elſe ſome inward, but not leſs afflicting Diſtreſſes of the other.

We may go on, and take Notice, that Miſery, ſo far as the Subject before us is concern'd,

cern'd, may be conſider'd either as preſent or future; as certain, or only probable: For Miſery paſt, to the Perſon who hath eſcaped it, furniſhes rather pleaſing, than painful Senſations; and to others becomes Matter not ſo much of Pity as Congratulation.

Miſery preſent is what we are principally concern'd about; and indeed what is ſometimes ſaid to be the only Object of Mercy: But this ſeems to carry the Matter too far, as ſhall be ſhewn immediately: Yet, I ſay, it is what this Virtue is principally converſant about; ſince that which is future or probable concerns us none otherwiſe, than becauſe it certainly ſhall be, or probably will be preſent.

And here the Virtue before us prompts Men to endeavour, ſo far as they can, to remove this Miſery, either in Whole, or in Part: Or, if this cannot be done, to abate the Senſe of this Calamity, by expreſſing a tender Concern for the ſuffering Perſon, and by ſupplying ſuch Materials as may enable him to bear what his Circumſtances will not permit him to remove.

Miſery future, or probably ſo, is, I reckon, as real an Object of Mercy as that which is preſent; and this, becauſe, if certainly future, it will in a ſhort time require the ſame Conduct as that which is now preſent: And, in the

the mean while, it allows a Proviſion of much Matter for Abatement, which preſent and urgent Miſery may render us unfit to furniſh. But that which is only probable, may yet be prevented: And if it be the Buſineſs of *Mercy* to remove or to abate preſent Suffering, it is equally concerned to hinder that which is likely to be hereafter. To this Purpoſe it is remarkable, that *Compaſſion* moves us as ſuddenly, and with as ſtrong a Force, to ſuccour a Perſon in immediate Danger, as under preſent Suffering; and to prevent, if poſſible, thoſe Calamities which afterward it may not be able to remove.

Before I cloſe this Head, it may be fit to obſerve ſomewhat concerning the Operations of this Virtue, as well inwardly upon the Mind itſelf, as outwardly upon the proper Objects of it.

As to the former, it being an Habit built on natural Compaſſion, and form'd by Reaſon and Prudence, it excites in the Mind a quick Senſe or Feeling of the Miſeries of others, in all Caſes where we ought to feel them; *i. e.* in all Caſes where it is fit we ſhould move to their Relief, and in which we are able with good Effect to do ſo.

Perhaps on ſome Occaſions it may go ſomewhat farther: For a tender-hearted and merciful

ciful Man may be ſo ſituated as to be able only to lament the Miſeries of others. His outward Powers may be limited; but his Mind notwithſtanding will not be the leſs affected. Poſſibly he may ſuffer the more inwardly on this very Account.

The pretended Philoſopher, it may be, will reproach this Temper, and call it Weakneſs: For why ſhould a Man be concern'd at that which he cannot help? — Why? — This is in ſome Caſes a Reaſon, Becauſe he cannot help it. And to cultivate ſuch a Diſpoſition, even in theſe Inſtances, preſerves it for other Occaſions of important Service hereafter.

Nor will it be ſufficient to object, that hereby we bring needleſs Diſtreſs upon ourſelves, whilſt, not content with our own Share of Suffering, we take part in that of others. The Objection carries with it ſomething ſenſeleſs and inhuman: For, Men are naturally allied to each other. If, attending to this State of Things, they muſt *bear one another's Burdens*, they muſt likewiſe mutually enjoy one another's Advantages. And if our inward Feeling of another's Calamity be grievous for the preſent, yet 'tis a Suffering which the Mind itſelf approves of: 'Tis what it farther approves upon a ſubſequent Recollection: And the Senſe from which the Suffering flows,

flows, is what a good Man would not chooſe to be free from, if he might.

The outward Exerciſe of this Virtue on its proper Object conſiſts in the bringing ſpeedy and effectual Relief, as far as we can, to the ſuffering Perſon; *the pouring Wine and Oil into the Wounds* of the injured Traveller, as our Saviour repreſents it; and the not *paſſing by on the other Side*, venting only ſome few uſeleſs Expreſſions of Pity. Real Mercy cannot bear the Sufferings of others without endeavouring to relieve them, any more than our own Senſe of Pain will permit us to ſit down careleſs under it.

The Virtue before us is ſo far from neglecting thoſe Miſeries of others which it ſees, that it ſearches after Objects of that kind, if capable of ſerving them. It even courts ſuch Objects with as great Zeal, as Selfiſhneſs courts the Favour of the Powerful. It ſpares no Pains, and grudges no Expences this way, which it is capable of affording, or which are fit and proper to be laid out.

In ſhort, notwithſtanding the Uneaſineſs which the firſt Motions of this Virtue muſt always be attended with, and that Leſſening of Fortune which muſt frequently ariſe from its outward Exerciſe, yet it builds up a Man's own real Happineſs; which is ſecured and improved

proved by attending properly to the Miſeries of other Men. And hence is it (as *Solomon* aſſures us), that the *merciful Man doeth Good to his own Soul.*

II. After having offer'd thus much on the Nature, Object, and Exerciſe of this Virtue, it may now be proper to enquire ſomewhat into the Ground and Foundation on which it becomes a Virtue.

All Virtue ſuppoſes Underſtanding and Will in the Being capable of having it; which operating according to juſt Principles, and ſuitably to the Nature and Reaſons of Things, the Habit itſelf is formed: And the future Cultivation and Improvement of it muſt be owing to the ſame Principles, to which it firſt owed its Riſe.

As to the Inſtance before us, the Matter may be thus ſtated, and the Mind found to proceed in the following Order.

1. There is actually ſubſiſting in the World a great Variety and Degree of Miſery

2. Each Man is furniſh'd with certain Abilities, whereby ſuch Miſery may either be prevented, or removed, or abated. And,

3. It

3. It is agreeable to the Nature and Reaſon of Things, that ſuch Abilities ſhould be exerciſed and applied to this Purpoſe.

The firſt Point hath been already touched on in the Beginning of this Diſcourſe, where I not only obſerv'd the Fact, but ſuggeſted ſomewhat of its Cauſes. The Fact itſelf is notorious. For whilſt we ſee it in others, we feel it likewiſe moſt ſenſibly in ourſelves.

Of the Evils which Men labour under, ſome ariſe from the very Frame and Conſtitution of Things. Such are frequently Sickneſs, Pain, Heat, Cold, Hunger, Thirſt, the Want not only of Conveniences, but Neceſſaries; inſomuch that whilſt we are ſolicited by natural Appetites, we are often ſo ſituated as to miſs the very Opportunities of gratifying them.

Other Evils there are, which we ourſelves create by following wrong Meaſures of Conduct. But, as we have no Ground to complain of theſe, ſo under them we ſcarce deſerve Relief. And yet even here, the Suffering being grievous, and the Caſe not beyond Remedy, ſome Degrees of Compaſſion may be due to us.

There is another plentiful Source of Miſery ſtill behind; I mean the Folly and Wickedneſs

neſs of Men contributing not only to make themſelves unhappy, but others more ſo. And the natural Powers Men have of doing this are favoured by the frequent Opportunities of exerting them, which ariſe from the Dependencies which they have on each other, and mutual Connexions between them.

Men are capable indeed of doing Good to each other; I mean, of promoting each other's Happineſs: But much more of doing Hurt. To the former, conſiderable Degrees of Power may be neceſſary in many Inſtances: But no one is ſo inſignificant as not to be capable of doing Miſchief. From all theſe Cauſes, operating perhaps at once, there is no Reaſon to wonder if Evil prevails in a very high Degree, and that the State of a great Part of Mankind at leaſt ſhould be truly deplorable.

Indeed it may be queſtion'd, whether, upon a due Balance, the Miſery of Mankind in general during the preſent State doth not exceed their Enjoyments; eſpecially when we conſider, that Occaſions of Pain, in ſome kind or other, do prepetually recur; — that theſe mixing with our Enjoyments ſpoil them; — that the Good ariſing from our Enjoyments is at beſt low and tranſient, whilſt the Evil accompanying is ſharp; — and that a very ſhort, if pungent, Pain overbalances a much more durable Pleaſure.

In theſe Circumſtances what Relief can Man of himſelf procure? Little more than what ariſes from the Conſciouſneſs of his own Virtue (if virtuous he be), and from the Hope of a better State of Things hereafter. This indeed is conſiderable in the way of Abatement, and may enable him to bear up decently. But ſtill it leaves him under his Sufferings; which, tho' in ſome degree qualified by this Mean, yet are not thereby removed.

Still our gracious Creator hath not left us deſtitute. If many of theſe Evils are cauſed by Man, by Man likewiſe may they be cured. And even thoſe which ariſe from the preſent Conſtitution of Things may admit ſome Relief in the very ſame Way. Becauſe,

2dly, Each Perſon is furniſh'd with certain Abilities, whereby human Miſery may be either prevented, or removed, or abated.

Indeed ſomething may be done in this reſpect by not abuſing their natural Powers. For, if Miſery as well to others as to ourſelves, follows that Abuſe, then by correcting the Cauſe we muſt proportionably hinder the Effect. And if each Man would for himſelf ſtudiouſly avoid the doing Miſchief, a very conſiderable Part of the Miſery which ſubſiſts would ceaſe.

But

But this is not what I am principally concerned to take notice of. The Abilities intended under this Head are of a greater Extent, and ſuch as ſerve to aſſiſt Men under almoſt every Kind of Unhappineſs.

All cannot indeed help each other in the ſame Way, and to the ſame Degree. Their Circumſtances being different, their Powers, which are the Reſult of theſe Circumſtances, muſt vary. But ſtill every Man hath ſome ſuch Sort of Ability; from the due Exerciſe of which no inconſiderable Conſequence muſt ariſe.

The Rich, the Powerful, and the Wiſe, may aſſiſt Men by their Wealth, by their Intereſt, by their Skill; whilſt others, in the loweſt Circumſtances, may bring ſuitable Relief in their own Way, — to thoſe at leaſt of their own Rank, with whom they have a cloſer and more intimate Correſpondence. And if Perſons of higher Rank be likewiſe aſſiſtant to theſe, whether by Direction or Encouragement, or by their Bounty, their Services will be ſtill of greater Conſequence. It is needleſs to enter into this Point more minutely, which will be beſt illuſtrated by each Man's own Obſervation.

3. It therefore remains to ſhew, that by exerciſing the foregoing Abilities to relieve the Unhappy,

Unhappy, Men act agreeably to the Nature and Reaſons of Things: And from hence the doing ſo muſt be ſtrictly and properly virtuous.

We ourſelves feel what Miſery is, and would avoid it. Others being framed like ourſelves, muſt be affected in the ſame manner, and would avoid it likewiſe. The Evil therefore is the ſame in both. And if it be in the Nature of Things fitting, that the Evil we would avoid ſhould, as far as poſſible, be removed, it muſt likewiſe be ſo in the Caſe of other Men. Their Sufferings, if equally the Object of Averſion, muſt equally demand a Cure.

Originally God intended no Evil. That which ariſes from the Conſtitution of Things, is, rightly conſider'd, *relative*, and the Reſult of a greater and more general Good. With regard to particular Men who ſuffer under it, perhaps ſometimes it is little more than an Abatement of the Good of Life. Or if it prove more grievous, may ſtill, in many Caſes, be remedied by the kind Offices of other Men, who ſeem intended by Providence for correcting the bad Influence of general Laws on the Intereſts of ſingle Perſons. The Laws themſelves are fit to be ſupported, becauſe the common Good requires it; but their accidental Operation to the Hurt of ſome muſt be equally as fit to be controul'd. And therefore,

therefore, ſince God hath thought fit not to interpoſe in an extraordinary Manner for this Purpoſe, He muſt be preſumed to leave it to ſubordinate Agents. Power being given them to do this Work, the Reaſon of the Thing muſt be ſufficient to direct this Power.

There are indeed Inſtances in which it is fitting that Men ſhould ſuffer; and perhaps that they ſhould continue in ſuch a State without Remedy. Theſe are out of the preſent Queſtion. Yet I will venture to affirm, that where there is no ſuch ſufficient Reaſon for ſuffering, there muſt always be a Reaſon againſt it. Suffering, in ſuch Caſes, being an Evil, both in the Eye of him who labours under it, and of all thoſe likewiſe who are Witneſſes of it, muſt, as ſuch, be diſapprov'd by every Being not evil: Perhaps it is impoſſible to be approv'd in that View by any Being whatſoever.

If it ſhould be ſaid, that on this foot no Evil could be produced at all, it may be replied, that ſtrictly ſpeaking, God never produces Evil: For, even that which appears to be ſuch to ſhort-ſighted Minds, if cauſed by Him, is upon the whole a Good. But then created Beings may produce it without Deſign; or, deſigning it to others, do hereby gratify ſome wrong Paſſion, or promote ſome miſtaken Intereſt of their own: And poſſibly

it

it may be worth inquiring, Whether abſolute Malice can be aſcribed to any intelligent Creatures any more than abſolute Goodneſs.

But, whatever Judgment ſhall be paſt on thoſe who have corrupted their Nature, and ſubdued the tender Sentiments originally implanted in them, yet every one not entirely degenerated will ſee Things better, and acknowledge the Principle I am ſpeaking of: So that whilſt labouring under Affliction himſelf he both deſires and expects Relief, he will diſcern that others likewiſe, in the ſame Circumſtances, muſt have the ſame equitable Expectations. And therefore, checking all undue Paſſions, and diſregarding any interfering Intereſts of his own, he will move chearfully to their Relief, increaſing his own Happineſs whilſt he removes, or leſſens, the Unhappineſs of other Men.

There is another Conſideration to the ſame Purpoſe. No one condemns in others the Exerciſe of Mercy, if it be truly ſuch; no not even thoſe, who may be led by their own narrow Selfiſhneſs to forbear ſhewing it in their own Perſons. It may coſt them Pains, or put them to ſome Expence, to do ſo. This they like not; and therefore withdraw their Attention from ſuch miſerable Objects, as they cannot view without ſome Degree of Compaſſion, nor relieve but at their own Charge. Yet, if another

another more tender-hearted Perſon ſhould ſtep in, and take ſuch Objects off their Hands, Compaſſion will be ſuffered to return: The afflicted Man will be thought to have deſerv'd Conſideration; and the Reliever, whom they have not the Heart to imitate, they will praiſe. So reaſonable and fitting a Conduct is this, that they cannot but expreſs their Approbation of it in others, though by doing ſo they even condemn themſelves.

III. It is time I ſhould now proceed to my laſt general Head; *viz.* To propoſe ſuch Motives as may induce Men to cultivate and diſplay this Virtue.

The Text aſſures us, *The merciful Man doeth Good to his own Soul*; i. e. he promotes his own beſt and moſt important Intereſt, — his Happineſs both in this World and the next. All Motives are comprehended under this: For it takes in the Whole of Self in its juſt and proper Senſe; from which every kind of proper Motive muſt be drawn.

Now the firſt Conſideration I would mention is this; the Virtue before us having its Foundation in the human Conſtitution, and being formed by Reaſon and Prudence, muſt in the Practice of it be agreeable, and in the Reflection comfortable.

I have ſaid, it is founded in Compaſſion;— a Principle born with us; and tho' capable, by a wrong Conduct on our Part, of being ſuppreſſed to a great Degree, yet is never totally extirpated. Even the moſt cruel and barbarous,— thoſe who have harden'd their Hearts, and ſeem even to delight in Miſchief, feel on ſome Occaſions the Operation of this Principle. They have ſome favourite Objects at leaſt, in whoſe Happineſs they delight, and whoſe Diſtreſſes they cannot but pity. Or if a few Inſtances to the contrary may be produced, they will however be found ſuch as were originally of a more tender Diſpoſition,— ſuch, as by the gradual Indulgence of the moſt execrable Vices have extinguiſh'd in themſelves every thing properly human; and ſo becoming Monſters in Nature, are Exceptions from its general Rules.

Be this however as it will, it is certain that the far greateſt Part of Mankind retain this Principle to a conſiderable Degree; and which they cannot, indeed would not, chuſe to part with, though in its firſt Motions it is attended with an uneaſy Perception, whilſt it makes the Miſeries of other People in ſome ſort their own. They indulge themſelves in it notwithſtanding; for it is natural to do ſo.

But then this Conſequence ariſes (which is likewiſe the very Deſign of Nature), that the Perſon

Perſon affected ſhould move to the Relief of the ſuffering Perſon; in doing which he finds a Satisfaction beyond what any other Kind of Enjoyment gives him. Of the Truth of this every one muſt be ſenſible in himſelf, if he recollects what paſs'd whilſt he was performing a generous and good-natur'd Action.

In truth, it cannot, according to the Nature of Things, be otherwiſe. For, if the firſt Motions of Compaſſion create in us a kind of Uneaſineſs, whilſt it intereſts us in the Miſeries which others ſuffer, then to exert ourſelves for their Relief, is to relieve ourſelves likewiſe. The Removal of their Calamities is the Removal of our own, ſince the Principle before us makes them ſuch. The immediate Reſult muſt be a Complacence, and Self-ſatisfaction rather to be conceiv'd than expreſſed in Words.

I know not whether a great Part of what is accounted the Happineſs of the preſent Life, doth not rather ariſe from the Removal of Uneaſineſs than from any poſitive Cauſe. Deſire itſelf is always accompanied with ſomething of this Nature, which the Gratification of that Deſire removes. It is certainly ſo in the Inſtances of Hunger and Thirſt, and perhaps of all the other natural Appetites whether of Body or Mind. In this Gratification we acquieſce.

From hence we become eaſy; and ſo far as this happy.

But in the Caſe which more eſpecially concerns us at preſent, there is not only a Removal of Uneaſineſs, or a Gratification of Deſire, but likewiſe a Conſciouſneſs of ſomething worthy, and becoming in the Whole. We are not only pleaſed with what we are doing, but with ourſelves in doing it. And in this the Satisfaction exceeds thoſe of any other kind, — thoſe at leaſt which regard only the Senſes, and concern Man not in his moral, but his animal Capacity. Such as terminate in the Senſes, are of a lower kind, and muſt quickly expire; whereas thoſe which principally regard the Mind, are of a higher Rank, and longer Continuance. For they not only imply ſomething agreeable for the preſent, but comfortable likewiſe in the Reflection.

Other Enjoyments are ſuch as are either vicious in their Nature, or elſe barely innocent. The former cannot be reflected on in a ſerious Hour without Remorſe. For being inconſiſtent with Reaſon, when our Reaſon gets the Upper-hand, ſhe will moſt aſſuredly condemn and puniſh them.

The Caſe indeed is otherwiſe, where Mens Enjoyments have been really innocent. There, as they have violated no Rules of Reaſon, they muſt

muſt of courſe eſcape its Cenſures; but yet, as theſe have not flow'd from the Dictates of Reaſon, Men cannot expect Applauſe. The Pleaſure enjoy'd, once over, is gone for ever, and can be properly revived no more.

It is ſtill worſe to conſider, that rational Reflection on ſuch paſt Enjoyments will create in us ſome ſort of Uneaſineſs, whilſt it excites a Deſire which may not perhaps be gratified again, and in ſome Circumſtances can never be gratified. Remembrance of this kind muſt be ſo far grievous.

But in the preſent Inſtance, whenever we look back, we enjoy the paſt Satisfaction anew. The Pleaſure we had in moving towards the Relief of the ſuffering Perſon is doubled by conſidering that the End aim'd at hath been accompliſh'd. We are not only pleaſed with having obtain'd this End, but with ourſelves likewiſe; and have this farther Satisfaction, that the Judgment of every other reaſonable Being concurs with and ſupports our own.

Yet, conſiderable as this is, a much ſtronger Motive will ariſe from what I ſhall chuſe to obſerve in the next place; *viz.* that the Virtue before us being a Conformity to the Divine Nature, and its Exerciſe a Copy of the Divine Example, it muſt on theſe Accounts

approve

approve us to the Supreme Being, and recommend us to his more eſpecial Favour.

The very ſame Arguments from whence we conclude the abſolute Goodneſs of God, muſt prove him likewiſe to be merciful. For if He cannot but will the Happineſs of his Creatures, ſo far as they are the proper Subjects of it, their Miſery, while undeſerv'd, muſt be proportionably diſpleaſing to Him.

This, as it may be deduced from his abſolute Perfection, is ſtill farther illuſtrated from the Meaſures of his known Providence. But the ſtrongeſt Manifeſtations appear in the Sacred Writings, where we are more diſtinctly taught what God is; and where He repreſents ſome of the Perfections of his Nature as the Patterns whereby we muſt improve our own.

In truth, there is no Divine Attribute more frequently or more expreſly pointed out in Scripture than that of Mercy. *The Lord is merciful and gracious*, [Exod. xxxiv. 6.]; *full of Compaſſion*, [Pſ. lxxxvi. 15.]; and unwilling that we ſhould ſuffer under thoſe very Judgments which we provoke, [*Ezek.* xviii. 21.]

This ſame Excellency which ſubſiſts in God without Bounds, and is indeed (if I may ſo ſpeak) the favourite Perfection of his Nature,

ture, He inculcates likewiſe on us in the ſtrongeſt Terms, and under the greateſt Encouragements. Thus, *Bleſſed are the Merciful, for they ſhall obtain Mercy*, ſaith our Saviour, [*Matth.* v. 7.] Nay, he hath been pleaſed to carry the Matter ſo far, as to enforce the Exerciſe of this Virtue not only towards diſtreſſed Innocents, but even thoſe who have provoked and injured us; to whom we are exhorted to ſhew Mercy as *our Father alſo is merciful.* [*Luke* vi. 36.] In conſequence of theſe Directions, which our bleſſed Lord himſelf hath given, St. *Paul* in his Epiſtle to the *Epheſians* repreſents the Matter thus: After having exhorted them *to be kind to one another, and tender-hearted*, [Eph. iv. 32.] he immediately ſubjoins, *Be ye therefore Followers of God as dear Children.* [Eph. v. 1.] Here the being merciful is conſidered as an Imitation of the moſt perfect and merciful Being; and farther recommended on this Conſideration, that we hereby act as *Children of God*, i. e. as Perſons more eſpecially endeared to Him.

Nor is it poſſible in the Nature of Things to be otherwiſe. For, what the Supreme Being contemplates in himſelf with infinite Complacency, He muſt, ſo far as it is imitated by his Creatures, approve, and love; and

and what he thus approves and loves, he muſt of courſe reward.

I am led from hence to a third Conſideration; *viz.* That at the laſt Day a principal Article of Enquiry will be this; Whether we have been merciful, or otherwiſe? See how our bleſſed Lord himſelf hath repreſented it in the xxvth Chapter of St. *Matthew*, where the Sentence to be pronounced on good Men is thus expreſs'd; *Come, ye bleſſed Children of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the Foundation of the World: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me Meat: I was thirſty, and ye gave me Drink: I was a Stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye cloathed me: I was ſick, and ye viſited me: I was in Priſon, and ye came unto me*, Matthew xxv. 34, 35, 36.

That this Matter ſhould be one Article in our great Account, muſt be preſumed by every one who believes a future Judgment, if Mercy be really a Virtue, and the Practice of it on that Score a Duty: But it is remarkable, that in theſe Words none other Article is mentioned: And ſo our future Fate may ſeem determinable from this ſingle Point.

Yet here let us ſtop a little, and be cautious; for our bleſſed Lord could never intend to be underſtood in ſuch a Senſe, as by exalting

ing one Virtue, to ſubvert and deſtroy all others. There is a great Variety of Duty incumbent on us, thro' our whole Courſe of Trial: And each of theſe will furniſh out Matter for future Enquiry; when our eternal State ſhall be determined, by a proper Regard to every thing we have done. The Whole of our Life muſt be taken in; in which each ſingle Duty muſt have its proper Place, and require its juſt Conſideration. The right Senſe therefore of the Words now cited muſt be this; That *Mercy* is a Point of the higheſt Importance; —a Point to which a principal Regard will be had; and conſequently, we are infinitely concern'd moſt diligently to cultivate in this Life, what muſt have ſo great an Influence on our Happineſs in another.

This, which our bleſſed Lord hath here taught us, we ſhall find ſupported by the Conſtitution and Order of Things. Thus is it, that God hath implanted in us ſuch a conſtant Monitor as the natural Principle of Compaſſion. Thus is it he inſtructs us by the Meaſures of his Providence, both extraordinary and common. For this very Purpoſe hath he given us ſuch frequent Opportunities to exerciſe this Virtue, by the Objects which every-where ſurround us; which being unprovided for, according to the ordinary Rules of his Adminiſtration, ſeem purpoſely intended to be reliev'd by us; eſpecially as each Man hath ſome

Power of doing ſo, if he will rightly uſe it. To all this we may add, That every cool Reflection on Acts of Mercy recommends them farther, and enforces the Exerciſe of them more ſtrongly.

Indeed, it is in ſome Senſe natural to the Mind of Man to expect Mercy or Judgment hereafter, as he hath proved merciful or cruel in this Life: For when this Scene is cloſing, nothing is more apt to give Refreſhment and Comfort, than the Reflection on Acts of Mercy; any Defects in which Regard, he endeavours to repair, by Benefactions, to take Place after Death. And on the other hand, every cool Remembrance of the Inhumanity with which he hath treated others, is grievous to him, and makes him even to abhor himſelf. Conſcious of what he deſerves, he dreads what to him ſeems approaching; and ſo, by anticipating the Judgment of Chriſt, he confirms it. What his own awakened Mind ſo ſtrongly ſuggeſts, muſt be real: *For if our Hearts condemn us, God is greater than our Hearts, and knoweth all Things*, 1 John iii. 20.

I ſhould now proceed to my laſt Motive, whereby the Practice of this Virtue may be enforc'd: —But I reſtrain myſelf a little, that after hearing the Report read, and offering one or two general Obſervations, I may return with

with more Advantage to the Proſecution of my Deſign.

Here the Report was read.

On hearing what hath been now read, one cannot but expreſs an Admiration of the Generoſity of thoſe, by whom ſuch great Foundations were firſt erected and endow'd. The Numbers of the Miſerable hence relieved, and the Variety of Caſes to which this Relief extends, muſt affect a thinking and humane Perſon ſtill more: So that 'tis ſcarce poſſible to attend this Day's Solemnity without Sentiments of Love, and Eſteem, and Veneration for the Memories of thoſe truly excellent Benefactors.

Yet you ſee, that extenſive as their Views were, their Endowments have not anſwered the Greatneſs of their Intentions: Room hath been ſtill left for the Generoſity of future Times: And the Effect of theſe Charities would be much leſs, if not aſſiſted by the Liberality of ſucceeding Benefactors. The preſent Age therefore claims its juſt Share of Praiſe: For if it were honourable to lay theſe Foundations at firſt, it muſt likewiſe be ſo to ſupport them when decaying; to ſupply them when deficient; and much more to enlarge them in proportion to the growing Neceſſities of Mankind.

Indeed, I cannot forbear (and I hope it will not be thought a Digreſſion from the proper Work of this Day); I cannot, I ſay, forbear taking Notice, that a tender and merciful Diſpoſition ſeems to have improved amongſt us, and to have become a ſpecial Character of the preſent Times. Witneſs the many new Erections ſuited to the various Wants and Diſtreſſes of the World: All theſe owe their Riſe to more ancient Foundations, ſupported, ſupplied, and enlarged, as they have been by your Liberality; whoſe good Effects have been ſo ſenſibly felt, that we have now the Pleaſure of ſeeing you imitated in many remoter Parts of the Kingdom: Nor is it any ſmall Acceſſion to your Praiſe, that thoſe, who by their Diſtance, or by their Numbers, cannot be directly relieved by you, do in ſome reſpect owe the Relief they receive to your generous Example.

The Virtue deſcribed at large in this Diſcourſe, is ſo important, and hath been ſo well illuſtrated by the Inſtances juſt now mentioned, that it deſerves to be ſupported by every Motive we can allege. To this Purpoſe ſeveral have been produc'd already: But there is ſtill another in Reſerve, to which every ſerious Chriſtian muſt give Attention. What I mean is this; In the Cloſe of our bleſſed Lord's Account of the Proceedings of the laſt Day, he himſelf tells us, That the Mercy we have

ſhewn

ſhewn to our Brethren, he accepts as ſhewn to himſelf: And this intimates to us, not only the Certainty of a Reward, but the Greatneſs of it likewiſe.

Poſſibly our bleſſed Lord in this whole Account, and eſpecially in this concluding Part of it, had a View to the then State of Things: For he ſaw, that the Religion he came to plant would be violently oppos'd; and, conſequently, the joint Labourers in this great Work were concern'd to ſupport each other as much as poſſible. He ſeems therefore to have ſtated the Matter in this Way, with an immediate View to their Encouragement.

But ſuppoſing this to have been the primary Intention of our Saviour on this Occaſion, yet the Words may in a juſt Proportion be fitly applied to other Caſes of Diſtreſs; all Chriſtians being, in other Places of Scripture, repreſented as his Friends and his Brethren; and all Men being, in a certain Senſe, equally the Sons of God.

Every miſerable Object therefore, if really pitiable, ſhould be pitied by us; and the Mercy which we ſhew on ſuch Occaſions, our bleſſed Lord will accept as ſhewn to himſelf.

He himſelf, if he were to act again on this Stage

Stage of the World, would, as he formerly did, ſhew his Compaſſion to the Miſerable: And when he aſcended, he did not intend to leave them friendleſs. What he would certainly do, if he were viſibly preſent, that he requires his Followers to do for them; and this under the moſt moving Encouragement, *Inaſmuch as ye have done it unto the leaſt of theſe my Brethren, ye have done it unto me:* —*Of theſe my Brethren*,—Perſons of the ſame Nature, which I myſelf aſſumed when I came into the World; —Perſons, who, on this Account, are as really my Brethren as yours; allied to me by the very Nature of their Being; and, which is more, farther related by the very Circumſtances of their Life: For Chriſt himſelf, during his State of Humiliation, was deſtitute and afflicted: And in this View, on ſome Occaſions, wanted even charitable Aſſiſtance.

Indeed, there is a further Reaſon why our bleſſed Lord ſhould propoſe the Encouragement before us: For, were he once more to return to this World, and paſs thro' his former Courſe of Affliction, thoſe who now bring Relief to the Afflicted, on the afore-mention'd Conſiderations, would be prompted by Reaſons ſtill ſtronger, to aſſiſt and relieve our bleſſed Lord himſelf: And therefore, ſince the Principles by which they are actuated, and which lead them to be merciful to others, would

would operate toward our bleſſed Lord's own Perſon, in ſimilar Circumſtances, we may ſee clearly why he puts ſuch a Value on theſe Services, and places them to his own proper Account.

From hence we are ſure of a Reward. No good Office done to others, ſhall in any-wiſe miſs it; much leſs that which hath a ſpecial Reference to Chriſt himſelf; and where the very Ground and Reaſon of it both ariſes from, and ends in him.

But, is this all? By no means; it will be proportionable to the Dignity of the Work we have been employed about: The Mercy which we have ſhewn to others, will be conſider'd as ſhewn to Chriſt; who is not only tender, but bountiful; and will repay us an hundred-fold for all we may expend in this Labour of Love.

What this Reward will be preciſely, we are unable to conceive at preſent: *For now we ſee thro' a Glaſs darkly*, 1 Cor. xiii. 12. Here we have a few Taſtes of real Happineſs allow'd us, and theſe ſcatter'd thro' a Life of Uneaſineſs and Pain: But from theſe, which ſerve to qualify the Uneaſineſs of our preſent Being, we learn to aſpire after a more conſummate Happineſs to come;—an Happineſs pure and unmix'd in its Beginning;—in its Progreſs ever improving;

improving; —and to be continued to us thro' a whole Eternity.

God grant that we may keep our Eye conſtantly fix'd on this great End! This will animate us in every Duty: And then neither the Hopes of Life, nor the Fear of Death, even the moſt cruel, can ever work ſo powerfully, as to induce us to fall from Him.

The E N D.

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